

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

CHILSTON PARK

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**CHILSTON PARK**

Name: CHILSTON PARK

County: Kent

District: Maidstone (District Authority)

Parish: Boughton Malherbe

County: Kent

District: Maidstone (District Authority)

Parish: Lenham

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.214409  
Longitude: 0.71167860  
National Grid Reference: TQ 89486 49628  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000522  
Date first listed: 01-May-1986

## Details

A late C17 or early C18 formal garden with early to late C19 alterations and additions, set in an C18 park with additional planting of C19 and C20 origin.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Hussey family received the manor of Chilston from the Fitzhamon lords at Leeds Castle in the C13, Henry Hussey selling it in 1545. It was bought by Edward Hales in 1650, the diarist, John Evelyn visiting his relatives at Chilston in 1666 (de Beer 1955). Hales' daughter sold it in 1698 to the Hon Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton whose son, William, made alterations to the house in c 1709. His son, John, enclosed the park and continued his father's improvements to the house and grounds (CL 1952) but by 1736 he had sold Chilston to Thomas Best who remodelled the house and made further improvements to the park, water, and adjacent grounds (Hasted 1797-1801). On the death of George Best in 1819, Chilston was bought, in 1821, by George Douglas. In 1858 it passed to James Stoddart Douglas who bequeathed it in 1875 to a distant Douglas relative, Aretas Akers, later (1911) to be created Baron Douglas of Baads and Viscount Chilston of Boughton Malherbe (and adding Douglas to his name). The estate remained in the Akers Douglas family until sold by the fourth Viscount in 1983 (Sale particulars). Parts of the parkland and walled gardens were purchased privately as farmland and dwellings, Chilston Park and gardens becoming a hotel under the ownership of Judith and Martin Miller. This were then owned for a short while in the mid 1990s by Philip Humphreys before being purchased by Arcadian Hotels in 1997 and opened as the present Chilston Park Country House Hotel. The site remains (1997) in mixed commercial and private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

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**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Chilston Park, cut through by the Maidstone to Ashford section of the M20 motorway, is situated 1km south-east of Sandling and c 0.5km north-east of Boughton Malherbe. The 78ha registered site comprises some 6ha of formal and ornamental gardens to the north and south of the house, set within 72ha of parkland and woodland of which c 13ha has, since c 1990, formed a detached strip on the north side of the M20. The central section of the site lies on the broad, level floor of a shallow east to west valley, the valley sides rising to north-east and south to the crests of parallel sandstone ridges. Narrow lanes, lined intermittently with hedges or hedgerow trees, run along the north side of the site (Lenham Heath Road) and along the northern half of both the east and west boundaries (Bowley Lane and Boughton Road), while to the south, the parkland merges on all its boundaries with wooded agricultural land which forms the wider landscape setting of the whole site.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The site is entered from Boughton Road to the west, some 300m south of its bridge over the motorway. The drive, lined along its north side by lime trees planted in the late C20, runs 600m eastwards to the house, following the route of a service drive shown on a survey of 1842 by Thomas Thurston and crossing, at its halfway point, a string of ponds shown on an earlier survey of 1719 but now (1997) silted up. The drive passes between the stable block and, on its north side, a car park built in the 1990s, to terminate in a gravelled turning circle, its form shown on a survey by T Budgen of 1802 as replacing a former early C18 walled forecourt, the circle now (1997) with a central bed and lead fountain. In the early C18 the principal approach to the house was along its northern axis which passed between two rectangular ponds on the site of the present lake. By 1802, a drive is shown entering at the north-west corner and crossing the park, on a similar south-easterly course to the present (1997), partly grassed-over stone track, to meet the northern axial approach on the north side of the ponds. This north-westerly drive, which had been diverted around the east end of the lake by 1842 (Thurston), although still the formal approach to the house in 1952 (CL), became little used in the late C20 (Sale particulars, 1983) and was cut off from its entrance gate by the construction of the M20 in 1991.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS** Chilston Park (listed grade I) sits in the south centre of the site, on level ground and with views contained by the ridge to the north and by rising ground and woodland to the south. The principal block, built in red brick with a hipped, tiled roof, is of two storeys with nine bays, the central three projecting slightly below a pediment. The house was built in the late C15 or early C16 as a courtyard house, an early C17 three-storey entrance tower (shown in Badeslade's engraving made in 1709, published in Harris 1719) being replaced with the present pediment during the refenestration of the north front in 1728 (CL 1952). The interior was substantially remodelled in c 1750 and a brick conservatory built onto the south front in the late C18 or early C19. The house was much enlarged in 1880 by an extension westwards and new office wings; the ground floor on the north front was also lowered, the present porch added, and the courtyard infilled with a staircase. After the Second World War the third Viscount Chilston restored the house and demolished the C19 west wing, the present two-storey brick extension to the west of the main block being built on its site in 1997.

To the immediate west of the extension is a C17 or early C18 L-shaped stable range. The single-storey building is of coursed stone with a stone mounting block on its south-facing wall. The range is extended on the west side by a C19 red-brick wing with round-headed double doors. At the south-east corner of the grassed and paved stable yard is a two-storey coachman's cottage, also of coursed stone. The whole complex (listed grade II) was converted to its present hotel use by the Millers in the 1980s (promotional leaflet, c 1990).

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the north, south, and south-west of the house. From the north front a short axial path with a central urn on a plinth leads to the south shore of the partially tree-fringed lake. Laid out as two rectangular ponds as part of the formal landscape setting for the house shown in Badeslade's engraving of 1709 (reproduced in CL 1952), the shape of the eastern or Little Pond had been altered to a more natural outline by 1802 (Budgen) and by 1842 (Thurston) the two ponds had been combined to form the present lake.

On its east and south sides, and formerly enclosed from the front drive in the late C19 and early to mid C20 by shrubbery (OS 1898, 1936), the house is set within a 110m x 120m, rectangular garden laid to lawns which rise in a steep slope towards the southern end. This garden, shown as a walled enclosure on Badeslade's view of 1709, is enclosed along its east side by a ragstone ha-ha which, at the raised, southern end of the garden, becomes a retaining wall. The west side of the garden is

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enclosed by a high wall. East of the house the lawns are open to the park but otherwise they are enclosed along the ha-ha and south wall by trees and shrubbery and dotted with a few isolated trees. Badeslade's view shows the garden laid out as a series of walled enclosures, with a canal running along the east side. By 1802 (Budgen) this formal layout had been replaced by open lawns with a perimeter path which had taken on a serpentine form by 1842 (Thurston), the lawns being planted with a scatter of trees, including conifers, in the mid C19 (OS 1875). To the south of the conservatory is a stone fountain basin, shown on the 1st edition OS map and, running along the foot of the west wall, a short length of canal shown on the survey of 1719.

To the west of the west wall of the garden and beyond a series of outbuildings and a cottage known as the Bothy, is a further c 80m x 90m walled garden with, at its north end, the Dower House, built by the third Viscount in the late C20 on the site of former C19 glasshouses. To the south of the Dower House the garden, shown as an open hop garden on Badeslade's 1709 view but enclosed and divided into formal garden plots by 1719, is laid to lawns with ornamental trees and shrubbery with, at the southern end and surrounded by trees to the south and west, an oblong pond with an island, the pond also shown in Badeslade's view.

**PARK** The park lies to the north-west, north, and north-east of the gardens. It was enclosed in the early C18 by John Hamilton and first planted in the C18, after 1719 (the survey of that date shows a pattern of fields). To the north-east, the parkland is laid to permanent or rotational grass and is largely treeless except for its two principal features. Axial on the east front of the house a c 50m broad lime avenue, with mature trees of mixed ages, runs for 450m from the ha-ha to the eastern site boundary. Although shown as a double avenue on Badeslade's view of 1709, on the survey of 1719 and on Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of 1769, the avenue is not recorded on Budgen's survey of 1802, which otherwise shows detailed parkland planting, nor on Mudge's map of Kent published in 1801. An avenue appears to have been replanted later in the C19, the 1st edition OS map, surveyed 1866-8, showing intermittent planting on the lines of the present single avenue, with some of the gaps having been filled by 1898 (OS). On the upper slopes of the ridge on the north side of the motorway is a scattered belt of pine trees, known as Lenham Pines and now (1997) in a damaged and declining state. These were planted between 1802 and 1842; the land was let to Kent County Council on a ninety-nine-year lease in 1965 (Sale particulars, 1983).

The parkland to the north and north-east of the house and on the south side of the lime avenue is scattered with a number of large clumps and a few individual trees, of mature but mixed ages, some surviving from those shown on the survey of 1802 (Budgen). The park contains several ponds, shown on the 1802 survey and including a circular one in the north-west corner which is now (1997) largely silted up. Some 40m to its south-east and part-way up the slope of the ridge, are the remnants of the stone walls of an icehouse depicted on the OS map of 1875.

South of the house and garden and on the axis of the south front, the straight, broad, former Fir Walk leads southwards on rising, undulating ground for c 600m to the boundary lane. Enclosed by Toll Wood to the east and by an intermittent line of trees on the west side, including a few mature conifers at the southern end, the line of the Walk is shown and named on the survey of 1719 and its individual trees marked on Budgen's survey of 1802.

**REFERENCES** J Harris, *The History of Kent* (1719), p 48 E Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent (1797-1801)* [Facsimile edn 1972] E S de Beer (ed), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (1959) *Country Life*, 112 (19 December 1952), pp 2030-3; (26 December 1952), pp 2096-9 J Newman, *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald* (1969), pp 168-9

Maps Survey of Chilston and Bowley Farms for John Hamilton, 1719 (U673 P3), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) J Andrews, A Dury and W Herbert, *A Topographical Map of the County of Kent*, 2" to 1 mile, 1769 W Mudge, *Map of Kent*, 1" to 1 mile, 1801 T Budgen, *Chilston Park together with Bowley Farm belonging to George Best, measured and mapped by T Budgen in 1802 for H Hogben Surveyor, 1802* (U673 P5), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) Thomas Thurston, *Plan of the Chilston Estate belonging to James Douglas Stoddart, 1842* (U673 P10), (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1866-8, published 1875 2nd edition published 1898 3rd edition published 1909 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published c 1875 [shows only land in Lenham parish; Chilston Park house and gardens not shown] 2nd edition published 1897

Illustrations T Badeslade, *View of Chilston, 1709* (published in Harris 1719)

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Archival items Humberts, Sale particulars, May 1983 (Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone) Promotional leaflet for Chilston Park Hotel, c 1990

Description written: October 1997 Amended: January 1999 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: November 2003

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.